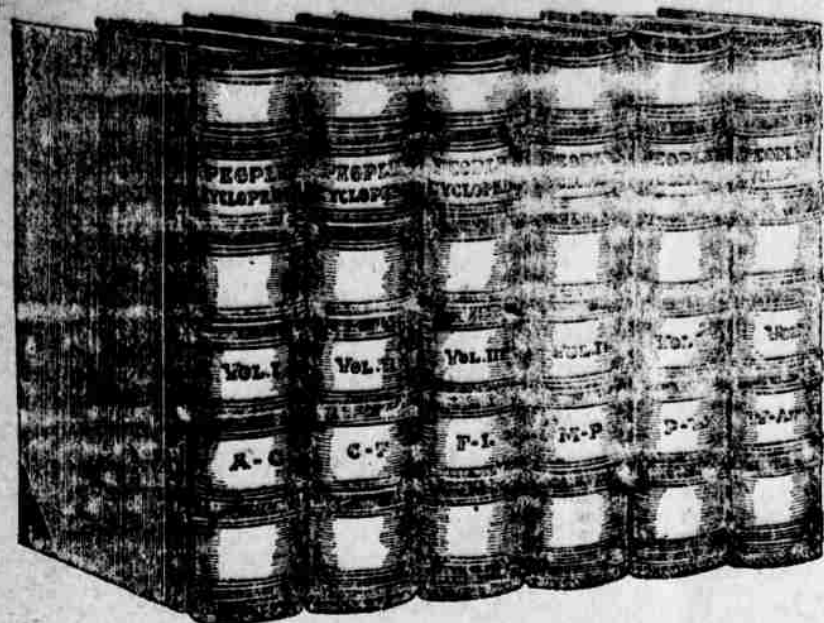


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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

International Lesson for January 30, 1898.—How to Pray.—Matt. 6:5-15.
[Arranged from Peloubet's Notes.]
GOLDEN TEXT.—Pray to thy Father which is in secret.—Matt. 6:6.
THIS LESSON includes verses 1-3—instructions as to heart-worship, with the emphasis on Prayer.
TIME.—In the summer of A. D. 30.
PLACE.—The Mount of Beatitudes, or Horns of Hattin.

THE LESSON.

I. Heart Worship.—Vs. 5-8. In the first half of this chapter Jesus gives us a lesson on heart worship, and applies the principle He lays down to giving, to praying and to fasting. The principle is that of absolute sincerity, without sham, without pretense, without unworthy motive concealed under the apparently good object.

The Principle Applied to Giving.—One should give alms for the sake of helping others, because it is right, because it is pleasing to God, because it is the natural outflow of love. So far as alms are given for the purpose of being honored and admired, it is hypocrisy and not virtue.

The Principle Applied to Prayer.—Vs. 5-8. 5. "Thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are," who do not really pray, do not desire or expect what they ask, or hold communion with God; but desire to appear very religious to men, and hence stand apart like the Pharisee in the parable, as if absorbed in devotion, "in the synagogues," the proper places of worship, where the worshippers can see them, "and in the corners of the streets," where they could be seen from four directions. "That they may be seen of men," who will praise them for their piety and think them very good. "They have their reward." The reward they sought. They got no answers, for they did not seek anything from God.

6. "But thou, when thou prayest," your real purpose being to pray, "enter into thy closet;" or secret chamber, where others can neither see nor hear. "Shut the door;" to keep out all other persons, as well as to shut out worldly thoughts. "Pray to thy Father;" who is your friend, who loves to aid his children. "Which is in secret;" The invisible spiritual God. "Which seeth in secret;" Knows every secret place, every hidden desire. "Shall Reward thee openly;" Better, as in R. V., recompense thee, answer your prayers. Give you the things you ask for, or, if these are not good for you, give you the better things you would have asked for, had you seen as God sees.

7. "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions;" The repeating over and over of set forms, as if there were some virtue in the mere act of praying; as if God would do something for them, on account of "their much speaking."

8. "Your Father;" No earthly father cares for a lot of heartless repetitions. Nor does our Heavenly Father. "Knoweth;" Appreciates; He feels for you, therefore you can come to Him with freedom, and ask what you will.

II. The Lord's Prayer.—Vs. 9-13. 9. "After this manner therefore pray ye;" With no vain repetitions, but as children asking of a father the things they need. (1). The fact that Christ gave His prayer in two different forms shows that no exact form of words was required; and the fact that Luke, writing at least 25 years after the formation of the church, gives one form, and Matthew another, shows that no obligatory form was in use in the churches.

Note that first in this prayer are the petitions for others—for God's honor, and the coming of His kingdom among men. After that, both in place and importance, come the petitions for ourselves. The very act of praying such a prayer enlarges and broadens the soul, and is an antidote to selfishness. In the two most important recorded prayers of Christ—at the institution of His supper (John 17), and in Gethsemane, He begins His prayer with petitions for Himself, but the spirit is precisely the same as in the first petition of the Lord's Prayer. He would be glorified in order that His Father might be glorified; and He would have the cup pass from Him, but only if the Lord's will could be best done in that way. He that does not want first of all to have the kingdom come within himself, and to do God's will as it is done in Heaven, cannot sincerely pray that others may do God's will, and belong to the kingdom.

An Enforcement of the Fifth Petition.—Vs. 14, 15. This marks the importance of this point. 14. "For if ye forgive men their trespasses;" The word indicates reckless and willful sin, conscious violations of right. The hardest sins to forgive. "Your Heavenly Father will . . . forgive you;" Because it shows that we are in that penitent condition which makes forgiveness possible for us, and good for us.

15. "But if ye forgive not;" God cannot forgive under such circumstances, without by the very act increasing sin, and injuring the one forgiven.

—Each one of us is bound to make the little circle in which he lives better and happier; each of us is bound to see that out of that small circle the widest good may flow; each of us may have fixed in his mind the thought that out of a single household may flow influences which shall stimulate the whole commonwealth and the whole civilized world.—Dean Stanley.

—One who has reached the age of 40 has been living 14,600 days, or 350,400 hours, or 21,024,000 minutes, or 1,261,440,000 seconds. If for just one of these seconds God had forgotten him he would have perished. "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?"

—Good work has no wages, because it is priceless; it is its own wage; only bad work has wages; so "the wages of sin is death, but eternal life is the gift of God."—Rev. Frank Crane.

—In judging another's honor we often place a valuation upon our own.

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